



## **Africa RISING West Africa Project Steering Committee Meeting**

**January 24, 2013; Accra, Ghana**

### **Minutes of Meeting**

#### **Present:**

Robert Asiedu, chair  
Jerry Glover USAID  
Ernest Asiedu, CORAF  
Kehinde Makinde, AGRA  
Eva Weltzien, ICRISAT  
Carlo Azzarri, IFPRI  
Olupomi Ajayi, AfricaRice  
Kathy Lopez, IITA  
Asamoah Larbi, IITA  
Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon, secretary

#### **Absent:**

A.B. Salifu, CSIR  
Farid Waliyar, ICRISAT, with apologies

#### **Observers:**

Tom van Mourik, ICRISAT  
Beliyou Haile, IFPRI  
Tracy Powell, USAID

**The meeting started at 08:40 and ended at 13:20.**

#### **Agenda:**

1. Welcome of PSC members (R. Asiedu, PSC Chairman; J. Glover, USAID Activity Manager)
2. Program and Project Management Structure, clarification of role of PSC and membership (I. Hoeschle-Zeledon, Project Coordinator)
3. Presentation of Program and Project Communication plans (K. Lopez, Project Communication Officer)
4. Reflection on the stakeholder workshop (R. Asiedu)
5. Discussion and approval of proposed year 2 workplan and budget (R. Asiedu)
6. Sub-contracting and fund disbursement (I. Hoeschle-Zeledon)
7. Next activities and upcoming events (I. Hoeschle-Zeledon)
8. Tamale office: space availability and internet connectivity (A. Larbi)
9. AOB (R. Asiedu)

#### **1. Welcome**

The meeting started at 08:40. The chairman, R. Asiedu, welcomed all the members of the PSC and observers present and stressed the importance of this first PSC meeting that should help

understanding the role of the members in the committee and the project. He sought and received approval of the agenda.

Glover expressed his satisfaction with the good attendance of the meeting and thanked everybody for attending.

A round of introduction of the members and guests followed.

## **2. Presentation of the Program Management Structure, clarification of role of PSC and membership**

The Project Coordinator, Hoeschle-Zeledon, presented the Program Management Structure.

Below discussion related to specific components of the Structure.

### *Program Coordination Team (PCT)*

The meeting suggested that minutes of the meetings of the steering committee be shared among all members of PCT and PSC in all three projects and that a report of what transpired in the PSC meeting be reported to the PCT. Likewise, the minutes of the PCT meeting should be distributed to the members of the PSCs.

The members were informed that the PCT would meet formally for the first time the following day.

### *Project Steering Committee (PSC)*

#### *a. membership*

Hoeschle-Zeledon gave a background on how the committee membership was decided. She said that when the project was launched in January 2012, there was a discussion on the composition of the Project Coordination Committee, as it was known then. All the CGIAR centers wanted to be represented as well as the other stakeholders, e.g., the regional fora, major players like AGRA, national organization partner representatives in both countries, etc., which is a very broad membership.

A compromise was found for the current composition: CORAF as the regional body, CSIR as the umbrella body for the national institution for Ghana, AGRA as an important player with many projects in N Ghana, ICRISAT as a permanent member because they are the main implementers in Mali, and one additional CGIAR center whose representation changes every year. AfricaRice represented the CGIAR for the first year, which started in October 2012 and ends in September 2013. Other members include the project M&E lead, communication specialist, the chief scientist for Africa RISING West Africa, and the Project coordinator who acts as the secretary.

Makinde asked why IER of Mali was not represented on the PSC. Glover responded that political decisions in the USA do not allow fund disbursement to government entities in Mali. Therefore collaboration with IER is currently suspended. Weltzien suggested inviting the NGO AMEED to the PSC membership. This was agreed but later reversed because AMEED is not involved in project activities this year.

#### *b. Terms of Reference*

Hoeschle-Zeledon presented the ToR of the PSC:

- Provides advice and oversight on Project activities
  - Provides science guidance to Project implementers to ensure conformity with Program Research Framework and Program Objectives
  - Guides Project planning and activities

- Approves annual Project workplan and budget
- Oversees coordination between project components and partners
- Liaises with MET to oversee M&E; cc PCT on all reporting
- Keeps PCT informed of activities via the Project Coordinator
- Reviews and makes suggestions to Project Coordinator on semiannual technical progress reports to USAID
- Plans yearly stakeholder meetings with support from Program Communications Team.
- Decisions made by consensus.
- Meets annually in person and virtually as called by the Chair.

She thanked the PSC members for their inputs to the last technical report sent to USAID in the second week of November 2012.

She explained that when the TOR was made, the understanding was that the PSC should agree on the date and the people to be invited to the meeting. She and Larbi organized this first meeting for West Africa without input from PSC members since the PSC had not yet met.

Makinde inquired about the private sector and was wondering how we could do scaling out of our activities without the private sector. Glover responded that it is important to note the difference between scaling up of activities that support development versus research on scaling on which Africa RISING is focussing. He added that Africa RISING is tightly linked to more development types of activities of other organizations, particularly those supported by the USAID country missions. Larbi reminded the meeting that most activities in the field would be carried out in collaboration with the private sector and NGOs. Weltzien added the private sector should be part of the planned R4D platforms.

It was suggested that the following item should be added to the ToR of all Steering Committees:

***PSC to raise agenda items to the PCT for their meetings***

*c. Evaluation and review*

The following questions came up:

*How do you gauge the level of satisfaction with the research?*

Hoeschle-Zeledon explained that she meets/talks to USAID regularly and the various project leads, and that there are so many meetings associated with the various projects. Because of the nature of the projects, Glover is really part of the projects and interacts a lot with the coordinators.

*Is there room for a mid-term review, an external committee review? Do we need to build in an external review to make it more meaningful? Is it worth investing more time and money on having a more critical review of the overall project?*

It was suggested that it would be in the project's best interest to be proactive and come up with a plan for an external review of some sort. This might satisfy USAID's desire to have an external review.

*Would this be a role for the steering committee: To communicate the external review or to raise a review of certain issues? Can this be added in the TOR: to suggest a time and scope of external project review? Is this something that should be considered by the PCT?*

The answer was "Yes".

It was proposed that the PSC particularly propose a mid-term review (mid-term lifespan of project), which is important for the project to be steered, and that the project would pay for the mid-term review.

Glover said that he will go back and discuss the requirements with USAID; he emphasized the importance of having a good framework for external review, who would fund it, what would satisfy them, etc. to make sure Africa RISING has the minimum requirements.

It was also suggested that PSC should identify areas where a review will help.

*Are there projects in USAID that have had an external review?*

According to Glover, USAID's parallel program in South Asia (CISA) cofunded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation had one. He said that CGIAR centers are quite resistant to having these outside reviewers come in and take extensive time with the partners to do the review. USAID and Gates funded some of the reviews. The results from this review could also be used to inform the project.

*Will the review be on the research activities?*

According to Glover, in CISA, the review included a review of the management structure, so it is far beyond research and is quite intensive.

*Is that a responsibility of the external scientific panel rather than assigning a reviewer?*

One of the key tasks for this planned panel would be to assist in review meetings or guide or comment on review meetings. The review has to be on certain activities and results but also include an element of the bigger picture type by project implementers.

Reports were considered very useful for the mid-term review. Because of the project complexity, committee members think that the review would benefit from people that are more permanently associated with reviewing on a regular basis, not just once.

Weltzien said that rather than planning for an external reviewer, the better option is to have the external science advisory panel taking more of that role, unless USAID has specific requirements.

Glover said it would do the project a lot of good to have a critical external review if USAID does require their own external review at some point.

Action point:

Africa RISING will not request an external review, but depending on what USAID requires, the PSC could suggest how the science advisory panel can function. The external advisory body would then feed their review results into this annual work review meeting with the objective that it influences the work planning.

#### *d. Timing of meetings*

It was explored whether all PSCs could meet at the same time. The Project Coordinator reminded the meeting that PSC meetings should be held in connection with a major meeting of the projects in their region to reduce travelling and costs.

It was also suggested that in future stakeholders should be able to give inputs to the planning of the next year's work. Therefore, the annual review meeting should be held in conjunction with the stakeholder meeting so that stakeholders could give feedback, buy-in and consider co-funding of components interesting to them. The annual planning meeting would be followed by the PSC meeting.

#### *e. Science Advisory Panel*

The meeting discussed the proposition regarding its composition made by the ESA Project Steering Committee. There was agreement about a mix of academic and practitioners among the members.

The main duties of such a panel were seen in (i) input to the review of the results each year and (ii) providing feedback on whether the project is moving in the right direction. The panel could also serve for more strategic purposes beyond science, such as policy issues. This would however require a name change.

### **3. Program and Project communication plans**

The project Communications lead, K. Lopez, made a brief presentation on program and project-level communication plans for year 2, differentiating some of the program-level and project-level activities. The program-level communication team gives directions and handles program-level requirements, and leads in organizing and facilitating major events; the project level communication focal point handles project requirements.

She also talked about some of the challenges in communication work.

Re the challenges, E. Asiedu said that many of them could be internalized if they are factored into the workplan and made sure that the technical workplans actively address these issues. Project staff have the responsibility to respond if they find communication as an important function.

It was emphasized that it is important to get the calendar of events at the project level. Giving an idea of what we plan for the year (calendar) is key.

Larbi said that all information comes from the grassroots level where activities are happening. He suggested that some aspects of communication could be handled by consultants at the local level with presence on the ground. For Ghana, he said that it might be better to just get stories on the ground through a part-time consultant.

Glover pointed out that we should not only do success stories but also capture narratives from the various projects.

Data management and databases came up in the discussion. Questions were asked on how this works, and the competencies that can be provided to Mali, the kinds of databases—reports, training events (directory, topics, women, men); data management at the project level—data collected from partners and how it can be shared with partners. This needs to be clarified further. The PSC said that this is not the responsibility of the communication focal point.

Mourik commented on the dissemination type activities. He said that there is plenty of material available from ICRISAT, IITA, other centers, and it would be good if Africa RISING can capitalize on this. He further said that it is just not clear in the workplans how we use these materials. For example, he said that video is not just a great dissemination tool but a good tool to start participatory research because it shows ideas on how farmers adopt technology or combine technology to get good results; it encourages farmers to come up with solutions themselves. He suggested that Africa RISING should start with some communication in the field.

He also said that there is a very strong link between scaling and communication. What is missing is how Africa RISING will do the research on scaling; this does not seem to be very well articulated in the framework but is an important issue as it is seen as a research output. How communication, research, and scaling are linked together is not very clear. This may not be the task of our communication person but we have to find the links.

Makinde said that we need to be ready to deal with civil society organizations (CSOs) in terms of planning, and in choosing audience and networking.

Clarification was also asked on what providing support for capacity building meant. Lopez said it means providing assistance in producing materials for training events but not conducting the training.

E. Asiedu said that partnership offers a very good opportunity to complement work that Africa RISING does; he said some things we cannot do can be done through effective partnerships. We need to see how we can effectively partner with institutions and organizations available within the project countries if we are talking at the ground level.

The committee agreed that it is important to integrate communication and knowledge management issues into technical workplans, and that communication plans should be integrated into workplans.

Action points:

1. For Ghana, identify a consultant who could work with partners in collecting stories and narratives.
2. For Mali, Lopez should interact directly with the ICRISAT communication officer who also deals with the French language.
3. Elevate data management and data storage issues for discussion to the PCT.
4. Lopez to provide a template for success stories or project narratives to project implementers.

#### **4. Reflection stakeholder meeting**

Makinde asked why there were no farmers present and recommended to invite in future Farmers' Organizations. He also recommended inviting them at the governance level (Steering Committee).

Hoeschle Zeledon responded that FOs had been invited in the past (inaugural meeting) but did not attend. Selected FOs, relevant to the project target region, would be considered for subsequent stakeholders' workshops. She also reminded the meeting that like the private sector, FOs will be part of the R4D platforms.

Weltzien and others felt that project internal discussions dominated the stakeholders' meeting to which the wider stakeholders could not contribute much.

The issues that came up during the meeting were recapitulated:

- Project sustainability and exit strategy
- Voice of national stakeholders
- Importance of extension services
- Finance credits
- Links with other agencies
- Alignment of databases with other organizations
- Systems integration and principles of integration
- Network of experimental sites
- Off-farm opportunities and alternative livelihood options
- Farming systems research
- Partnership issues
- Purchase of capital items for NARS
- Gender
- Scaling

A discussion started around impact of Africa RISING and monitoring of indicators. Glover explained that in the Program document the purpose demonstrates why the Program is being implemented. However, the three projects will not be responsible for the higher level targets. He clarified that Africa RISING could not be compared with the sister Program CISA in Southern Asia which has a focus on development rather than research because of its 10 years history of implementation.

Azzarri stressed that IFPRI would do evaluation of impact of Africa RISING and monitor the 9 Feed the Future indicators provided for Africa RISING. He explained that no baseline surveys were carried out during year 1 because the quick win activities were not meant to continue and data needs by the researches were not known.

The chair commented that the project could not wait for the baseline surveys to be completed and analysed in a few months and a compromise should be found to collect the necessary information to guide field activities for the coming season.

Azzarri suggested carrying out focused group discussions which would lead to qualitative information. The quantitative data would be collected later.

Weltzien said that a small team should discuss what type of surveys should be conducted and what indicators should be established beyond the FtF indicators.

Mourik remarked the FtF indicators were not appropriate and the project should develop its own, and Weltzien added that the indicators should be at the objective level.

Azzarri reminded the meeting that the surveys could be designed around our own indicators and that this was a suggestion already made at a meeting in September in Addis.

Glover also expressed his concerns that the presentations of the previous day did not reveal at which scale (plot, field, farm, landscape) the project would work and what the treatments would be. He suggested a side meeting for the evening.

## **6. Discussion and approval of proposed year 2 workplan and budget**

Larbi started by presenting the Ghana workplan for 2013-2016 using the template he had developed for both countries and which was distributed to partners to fill in their activities and milestones. He informed that in most cases partners did not give the details of the type of treatments they were planning.

Mourik responded that in participatory research researchers cannot come with prefixed treatments to the farmers. Otherwise the experiments would be only researcher managed.

Glover stressed that there would be need for researcher managed trials, even on-station trials to answer certain research questions but there should be room for farmer managed experiments; it should be a mix of different experimental approaches.

Regarding determination of type of experiments Mourik stated that the researchers would need to know the constraints of the farmers.

Larbi responded that the community analysis carried out last year in 60 communities in northern Ghana provided the constraints of the farmers and these would not be different in new communities in the same area.

The chairman also recommended making use of local information and knowledge of local partners.

When looking at item no. 5 of the Ghana workplan table (Cross cutting activities) it was suggested to change the title to 'Capacity strengthening, Coordination, and Communication' to better reflect the activities lumped under the heading.

Glover asked whether the introductory text to the workplan would explain materials and methods, number of communities, households, plot sizes, scale of treatments. He said that these should be clearly spelled out. He also stressed the need for well articulated hypotheses and the logic from the hypotheses to the outcomes and activities. He was wondering whether there were project specific hypotheses and whether the proposed activities would be able to test them. As these hypotheses seemed to be missing he proposed to start a first discussion on them during the smaller side meeting scheduled for the evening.

Glover also remarked that the development of the project document would need a revision of the Program Document.

Makinde was wondering whether the technologies being introduced to farmers would move to other places on their own.

It was explained that the project will link with development partners for outscaling of research results.

The workplan for the Mali component was not discussed explicitly as it was presented during the Stakeholder meeting and the issues and questions related to the Ghana workplan largely apply to the Mali workplan too.

Due to the many open questions regarding the research approach and workplans the meeting decided to defer the approval of the workplans.

The following road map was decided:

1. Hypotheses and improved structure of workplans within one week
2. Revision of activities before 14 February
3. Revised workplans shared with Steering Committee members by 14 February
4. Virtual Steering Committee meeting on 19 February at 09:00am Washington DC time
5. If approved, sub-agreements between IITA and partners by end of February
6. Meeting with IFPRI on baseline survey questionnaire development 2<sup>nd</sup> week of February
7. Project document to be prepared later

The Project budget as prepared and presented by the Coordinator was approved noting that the revision of the workplans might lead to some changes.

## **7. Sub-contracting and fund disbursement**

The Coordinator presented to the meeting issues of sub-contracting, sub-sub-contracting, and fund disbursement based on year 1 experience. As an example, she mentioned that SARI is the key partner of IITA in Ghana and therefore subcontracted to carry out activities. SARI however is also a key partner of AfricaRice, the leader of all rice related activities, and of ICRISAT leading the sorghum activities. Both AfricaRice and ICRISAT will sub-contract SARI. This leads to the situation that SARI



will have to handle several agreements under Africa RISING. This adds to their administrative load. It also causes additional transaction costs and delays in fund disbursement.

The Steering Committee decided that in cases where the main research partners (e.g. AfricaRice, ICRISAT,...) subcontract a NARS that is also sub-contracted by IITA all these sub-agreements will be lumped together and a single contract will be issued to the NARS, including fund disbursement from IITA. The main research partners will still manage the research. They will inform IITA on the activities they plan to sub-contract to the NARS and the associated budget. The NARS will report to IITA but with cc to AfricaRice, ICRISAT, ...

A similar procedure has been decided for handling AVRDC contracts. The center works in Ghana in rice and maize based systems and in Mali in sorghum based systems. AVRDC already last year refused to handle several contracts within Africa RISING. Therefore AfricaRice and ICRISAT are requested to inform IITA which activities AVRDC will be carrying out under their oversight and what budget will be allocated to these. IITA will issue a single contract with three activity components.

This should apply to any other IARC involved in activities in both countries or under the oversight of other IARCs if they wish so (e.g. ILRI).

## **7. Next activities**

The Coordinator presented the following next activities:

- Finalization of workplans (submission on 14 February and approval on 19 February), program and project document (to be discussed at PCT meeting), and preparation of sub-agreements with partners (that will be done after the workplan is prepared), by end of February
- Recruitment of staff for Ghana for Upper East and Upper West. Activities will not start yet since negotiations are ongoing with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture for office space, etc.
- Preparation of 6-month technical report until 31 March, to be submitted 30 of April. Draft report will be circulated for approval at the beginning of April.
- The photojournalist visit has not been finalized, but this may happen before the end of this fiscal year (September).
- Organization of program-wide learning event will be discussed at PCT, also the peer exchange of national scientists.
- There will always be smaller events at local level.
- Suggested dates for review, stakeholder, steering committee, planning committee meetings will be distributed soon for the year.
- After the finalization of the project document and revision of activities and workplans, a meeting on the survey instrument was suggested for end of February or beginning of March. This (virtual) meeting should take place before going to field and should involve the research teams of both Ghana and Mali, which would have a similar instrument.

## **8. AOB**

Additional issues discussed or tabled for discussion at another time:

- Tamale office and internet issues can be discussed separately.
- Data storage, data management are heavy issues to be passed to PCT for discussion.

- Number of partners. Although the issue of partners is seen as very important and critical we should be willing to let go of some partners if necessary and make those partners that we want really happy.
- According to Glover, there is heavy pressure to make Africa RISING a development project. Extension, access to credit, and inclusion of farmers, are crucial, he said, but it should be carefully considered if these will contribute to the research focus or we will be trying to satisfy additional pressure to include more people. Africa RISING is a research effort; USAID puts much more money into development projects, and if we try to become just another development project our significance will be swallowed up by those with large pools of money, so protection of our research identity is critical. There is not much research money at USAID, so we need to protect what we have, and connect our research outcomes to development efforts.
- Larbi brought up the issue of potential/ongoing projects with CORAF. E. Asiedu explained that CORAF has a lot of initiatives in Ghana under AusAid—farming systems project, which the Crops Research Institute is coordinating; and crop-livestock integration. SARI is also coordinating a project on seed systems, so CORAF and Africa RISING can link together. ILRI and ICRISAT are providing backstopping on this project. Glover suggested mapping out the relevant individuals to see if the same SARI people are working on the various projects. USAID will follow up with CORAF on some broad areas for collaboration, with action sites already mapped out, research integration into the platforms, impact pathways, research approaches, and a project mapping tool that IFPRI has worked on.

## **9. Closing**

R. Asiedu thanked everyone for their inputs and closed the meeting at 1:20 p.m.

Ibadan, 04 January, 2013

I. Hoeschle-Zeledon

Secretary, PSC Africa RISING West Africa Project

K. Lopez

Communication Specialist, Africa RISING West Africa Project